

UBC Department of Philosophy Colloquium

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Why Can't I Change Bruckner's *Eighth Symphony*?



Musical works change. Bruckner revised his *Eighth Symphony*. Melodies and lyrics of jazz standards and folk songs change over time. If we accept that musical works genuinely change in these ways, a puzzle arises: why can't I change Bruckner's *Eighth Symphony*? More generally, why are some individuals in a privileged position when it comes to changing musical works and other artifacts, such as novels, films, and words? I give a view of musical works that helps to answer these questions. Musical works, on this view, are created abstract objects with no parts. The paradigmatic changes that musical works undergo are socially determined normative changes in how they should be performed. Due to contingent social practices, Bruckner, but not I, can change how his symphony should be performed. Were social practices radically different, I would be able to change his symphony. This view extends to abstract artifacts beyond music, including novels, films, words, games, and corporations.

FRIDAY, November 9th BUCH A202 3:00 – 5:00

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